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American Loyalty

An Address Delivered in the Old
South Church, Boston, Massachusetts, at
the Morning Service, March 18, 1917
by the Rev. George A. Gordon, D.D.

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NOTE

THIS address was delivered at the morning service of The Old South Church, March 18, 1917, when there was displayed the flag presented by members of the Church for permanent use in the auditorium.

A plate to be affixed to the flag-staff will bear an inscription embodying the facts recorded in the following statement, which appeared upon the Order of Service for the day:

THE NATIONAL FLAG DISPLAYED THIS DAY IS PRESENTED TO THE OLD SOUTH CHURCH BY SEVERAL OF ITS MEMBERS WHO SERVED THEIR COUNTRY IN THE WAR FOR THE PRESERVATION OF THE UNION, IN THE TWENTY-FIFTH, THE FORTY-THIRD—OF WHICH THE FIFTEENTH MINISTER OF THIS CHURCH, JACOB MERRILL MANNING, WAS CHAPLAIN—THE FORTY-FOURTH AND THE FORTY-FIFTH REGIMENTS OF MASSACHUSETTS VOLUNTEERS. IT IS PRESENTED IN HAPPY MEMORY OF THEIR COMRADES, LIVING AND DEAD; IN EVER DEEPENING LOYALTY TO THEIR BELOVED COUNTRY; IN THE SURE FAITH THAT THE OLD SOUTH CHURCH WILL CONTINUE TO BE WHAT IT HAS EVER BEEN, A PROPHET OF THE INTEGRITY AND FREEDOM OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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MAR 28 1917

American Loyalty

For where thy treasure is there will thy heart be also.

MATT. VI : 21.

WHEN we think of the many races that go to make the one hundred million Americans of today, what assurances have we of their loyalty to this new country in times of international crisis? Here are men from every nation under heaven. Is there any outpouring upon them of high power, any descent of patriotic fire, any fresh consciousness of the Holy Spirit of political freedom and hope, mighty enough to bind these races into one vast brotherhood of loyal and proud Americans?

We must confess, at the outset, to the presence of two serious disadvantages. The first is the absence of homogeneousness. Homogeneousness is a mighty factor in national unity. Where the people are of one stock, where they are from centre to circumference kith and kin, there, in all times of crisis, national feeling is wont to go with the universal movement and strength of the tide. No part of the nation has power to go the other way; it is all one, and it runs to the flood as by the will of the Infinite. This wonder of homogeneous strength we do not possess; this initial, natural, inevitable loyalty is not ours.

Nor have we Americans the instinct of loyalty to our country born of history. Whether we know it or nor, the voices of history sing in the soul of a nation, and charm it into unity, both when the song is a dirge and a pæon. In the fibre of our flesh, in blood and brain there are stored the subtlest memories, the most potent susceptibilities. Men are largely the resultant of racial experiences in the historic environment in which their ancestors have lived. They are born with instinctive loves for nature as she appears in a particular country. Even the universal features of nature, sunrise and sunset, the morning and evening stars, take on new beauty and splendor because they shine through the dear heavens that bend above the beloved land. For these peoples nature is bathed and transfigured in the most moving human associations; it is never beheld except through the eyes of racial achievement, suffering, love and tears. Nature becomes a country whose homes are founded and whose cradles are rocked upon a land of hollowed graves. Loyalty here rises as by the force of gravity, it is pushed upward by the unseen might of immemorial generations, it calls aloud in the strength of great instincts; it can be undone only by the wreck of all social order that comes from the sway of the tyrant. This vast assurance of unity and loyalty we possess only in a minority of our people, and it would be folly to underestimate our poverty here.

We must seek for assurances of the loyalty of Americans, of all races, in other spheres of

human nature: in immediate experience of good, in the strength of reason, in the magic of just imagination, and in the sense of obligation to the future. These fountains of loyalty will be found, I am persuaded, abundant and perennial.

1. I name immediate experience of benefit as the first universal assurance of American loyalty. This does not hold for adventurers, shirks or humbugs. We discount them. We affirm that for the healthy, the industrious, the enterprising and the earnest of all races it is good to be here. Work is surer here than elsewhere for the man willing to work, wages are higher, food is more abundant and of finer quality, the conditions of life are more wholesome, the chances to rise in the grade of one's work are better; while the opportunities for personal improvement by education, and the sympathy of good men with aspiring youth are in America simply incomparable.

When the children are made part of this experience the assurance of loyalty becomes much stronger. The children go to the public schools; they read the history of the Revolution; they take pride in it as their own, and sometimes they ask, as an Englishman's boy did, after reading a description of the battle of Bunker Hill, "Father, be you an Englishman?" "Yes, my boy," was the reply. "Then we licked you." When the poor immigrant finds it possible to send his gifted boys and girls to college; when he sees them treated with respect; when he sees them graduate, as is often the case, among the first scholars of their

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class; when he further sees them thus equipped entering life with alluring prospects of success, he is, as I have found, in many instances, bowed down with a sense of gratitude to the country in which this experience of good is possible. Thousands of humble parents, in in the last twenty years, have gone on commencement day to Harvard, Yale, Columbia, all the greater colleges and universities of the country, to witness the triumph of their sons and daughters, to give expression to their pride and joy, and to confess grateful allegiance to the institutions of learning that have thus taught, inspired, wrought into worth and power the lives of those dearest to them. Here is a shuttle flying without ceasing in the High Schools and Colleges of the land, threaded with the sense of benefit, on the loom of unrestricted opportunity, weaving the robe, in royal purple and gold, of American loyalty.

There is another immediate experience of good that issues in loyal love for this country. Immigrants leave behind them needy kinsmen, parents, sisters and others of remoter relationship. The true-hearted, who in this new land do not forget the old, who in founding families here remember with tender and devout affection the home circles in which their life began, are able to send generous help to those in distress. They are able to do this without the sense of hardship; they are able to do what they could not have done had they never come hither. From the surplus of wages earned in this richer land, they enjoy the privilege denied them before, the privilege of making the existence

of their needy kindred in the old home less of a burden, more of a happiness. Picture this privilege when it concerns a beloved mother. Look at her in age, infirmity and want; think of the good she has done, the sons and daughters that she has given to the world. Imagine her life of toil, anxiety, tenderness and tears; life has taken at each stage all that she had to give; it has taken at last her strength of body and her vigor of heart. Others of her children are themselves so burdened that they can hardly come to her rescue. Several of them have come here; they have prospered, and they are able to turn the stormy afternoon of their mother's life into sunshine, and the evening into peace. The cottage of many an aged mother is made comfortable and cheery by day, and lights are made to twinkle brightly from its windows in the oncoming night, because of the constant and generous devotion of sons and daughters in America. When the end has come, and the beloved dead is laid to rest in the ancient church-yard, and the memorial stone is set in dear remembrance to guard the sacred spot, the sense of the privilege freely bestowed by America, to utter the feelings of veneration in acts of veneration, rises into a kind of religious homage to this beneficent land.

When the three disciples of Jesus who were selected to share the transcendent vision of their Master's transfiguration were under the wonder of this privilege, one of them cried out, Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us build three tabernacles, one for thee, one for Moses and one for Elijah. The immediate ex-

perience of good, rare and exalted good, good that is good for the entire circle of kindred lives, good that is good for the worthy who have spent their strength in love and service, good for age, leaning on its staff and in want, issues forever in the passionate desire to build a permanent grateful abode there. Our country has given us these immediate experiences of good, therefore we love it, with a grateful and loyal devotion.

2. There is next the work of reason. Reflection upon life here, in contrast to life in the old country, issues in a fresh experience of good. The first feeling of the immigrant is apt to be a perverse sentiment. Everything in the old country stands transfigured. This is part of life, and is both good and evil.

*"Care and trial seem at last
Through memory's sunset air,
Like mountain ranges overpast,
In purple distance fair."*

The new American has to wage a battle with this perverse feeling, which is not a pure recollection but often a pure hallucination. Everything in the old country is at first glorified, everything in the new is at first belittled, if not bitterly reproached. America, it was hoped, would prove itself to be Paradise; instead it is a land where thorns and thistles grow, where men eat their bread in the sweat of their brow. It thus appears as a sullen and ugly disappointment; the old country, glowing in the rosy light of the far-away sunrise, in spite of the years of trouble and sorrow, is now felt to be

Paradise, and it has been left behind and abandoned for this! While this perverse feeling continues, this wild juggler with truth, this necromancer who paints old sorrows in heavenly colors, who darkens angel faces with the dye of fiends, there is no hope for reasonable comparison and reconciliation.

Homesickness is a fearful malady, but it is not incurable. It is a self-limiting disease, and if the patient does not die, time will prove the great effective physician, as in other human afflictions, so in this. Homesickness resembles a certain extreme alcoholic disturbance; it fills the palatial dwelling where it is with vipers and demons; it transforms the squalid hut where it is not, where it longs to be, into a place of celestial freedom and peace. Intoxication at its worst, if the patient is isolated long enough, comes at length to soberness; homesickness, however long it may run riot, eventually gives way to sound sense and calm judgment. Then it is that a new epoch arrives in the life of the American immigrant. Reason emerges, calls for the plain facts, sets the old and the new in fair comparison, and upon due deliberation goes forward to a just conclusion.

Friends are as numerous here as in the old country, employers are more just and considerate, men are rated, in this land as nowhere else, on their merit, worth is surer of recognition, capacity of promotion, energy of success; besides, there is a surrounding atmosphere of sympathy with pluck, daring, devotion to one's task and faith in one's ideals. Here the balance of goods is clearly in favor of the new country.

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Through a reasonable mind the immigrant is winning a new love for America.

In the old world society, as a general thing, is still deeply influenced by the feeling of caste. There is the King, there is the royal household; there is the duke, the marquis, the earl, the viscount, the baron, and the poor first rung of the aristocratic ladder, the Sir somebody. It is true that the feudalistic order of society has received many hard knocks; it is true that a million voices roll into all sorts of aristocratic ears the great plea of Burns for essential manhood:

*“ A prince can make a belted knight,
A marquis, duke, and a’ that;
But an honest man’s aboon his might,
Guid faith he maunna fa’ that!
For a’ that, and a’ that,
Their dignities, an’ a’ that,
The pith o’ sense, and pride o’ worth,
Are higher rank than a’ that.”*

Still, in the most democratic countries of Europe these words are more or less of a defiant protest against a dominant adverse order; while here they utter with trumpet tones, and amid universal approval the prevailing social sentiment. The exceptions, in the person of the snob, the plutocrat, and other abnormal Americans, men and women, are after all purely incidental and completely insignificant. The atmosphere is, broadly speaking, wholly favorable to the recognition of noble character as everywhere the supreme thing in American society. Thus as the American immigrant pon-

ders this new phenomenon, it commends itself to his reason; the longer he considers it, the surer he is that here is one of the best and most hopeful things in the world.

The next step is plain. Here in the dignity of toil, in the doctrine that usefulness to society is always a badge of honor; here in expansive social freedom, in the equality of honest man with honest man; here in the public contempt for idleness and wealth devoted to mere display and lust; here in the aboriginal American idea of the intrinsic worth of nothing but manhood and womanhood, is the greatest chance on earth for the free and unrestricted development of the best forces in our nature, — diligence, skill, conscientiousness, self-respect, in one great phrase, the humanity of man. Here we are not serfs, we are no man's tools; we are not machines or drudges, we are citizens of the United States of America. We cannot be ruled without our consent. Our rulers represent us; they are accountable to us; our relation to them is not that of subjects to a sovereign, but that of a sovereign to his responsible servants.

Slowly the economic, the social and the political advantages here rise into the heart of the American immigrant through his understanding. America means for him, as he reflects upon its structure, a new world. Therefore with the consent of his whole mind he comes to identify his existence and fate with the existence and fate of the American Republic.

3. The loyalty of all true Americans is greatened by the power of a just imagination. Imag-

ination is the telescope of the mind; it makes visible blazing realities that otherwise would remain invisible. There is the size of this country. The travel of the average American can lead to no adequate notion of this reality. The eye takes in but a small part of the district where one lives. This continental land can be seen only through the telescope of imagination. When the western limit of Alaska lies in the glow of sunset, the eastern limit of Maine is burning in the fire of sunrise. Here is a Republic on which the sun never sets. One sees imagination at work representing the enchanting physical greatness of our country, in such familiar anecdotes as these: An American in England is afraid to go out after dark, lest he may fall off the Island into the sea. There is not enough water in the Thames and the Severn, the Tweed and the Clyde, to gargle one of the mouths of the Mississippi. The United States is bounded on the north by the Aurora Borealis, on the south by the Southern Cross, on the east by the Primeval Chaos, and on the west by the Day of Judgment. Size is always impressive. In the winter months, look, of a clear evening, at the star Sirius, the brightest splendor in the stellar universe. Read the calculated dimensions and brilliancy of this star made by astronomers, and with imagination thus informed, allow this superlative wonder of the heavens to cast its spell over you. In this way you will come to understand the unique impressiveness of the physical magnitude of the Republic. When to this we add scenery unsurpassed, economic resources unequalled, the

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possibility of homes and food for hundreds of millions of prosperous and happy human beings, we have on the mere physical level of existence a nation with a unique appeal to the imagination of its citizens.

Let imagination paint another picture. Think what American intellect and energy have done, within one hundred years, for our people and for the world, in the development of the economic resources of the nation. It is a miraculous story, to be told only in the language of inspired dreams: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose." American inventions are in the service of the civilized world. American science has an honorable place wherever science is known, and in one science at least, astronomy, America has for the last thirty years led the world. In applied science our country is fast becoming the equal of the best; our technical schools and state universities are putting scientific intelligence in command of the economic resources and needs of our people. Education has become a passion among our youth, and the story of the wealth devoted to education in the last fifty years reads like a fairy tale. Religion here is a reality where it is anything. The saddest revelation of this war concerns Christianity. In Europe among rulers and men of power it is little more than an academic interest, a sentimental memory. Among Protestants and Catholics alike, for the time at least, the glory is departed. Nowhere is there a great prophet of hope, a church with a mighty

forward look, a community of men swayed by moral faith in the universe, and in mankind. The backward look is great, the retrospect is an enchantment, yesterday illumines the world with its character and power; today is a day of darkness and tomorrow is midnight. The hope of the Catholic faith is here; the future of essential religion is here; the forward look is here, and it is great with high expectation.

All these realities do not appeal with equal power to all our people; to many of our people the higher among these realities make no appeal. Yet as a grand totality, these realities make our country the wonder and splendor that it is in the imagination of all true citizens. Magnitude, wealth, beauty, intellect, — practical and scientific, — religion, whether in the ancient form of authority or in the freedom of this modern day, and the future, promising the richest realization for the highest dreams of a great people; here is our country, as it lives in the imagination of the millions that love it.

This Republic belongs to our people; it is theirs to enjoy, to defend, to heighten in worth, and to transmit to future generations. I believe that a new sense of ownership and obligation is almost sure to come out of the present crisis. America is ours to enjoy, ours to guard, ours to live for, ours if need be to die for; and if this shall be the mood of our people, a new America shall arise fairer still and yet more beloved. This is one of the reasons why I favor the universal military training of all fit young men. It puts the nation into the imagination of youth, as their nation; it lifts the

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country before the eyes of our people as a glorious banner; it calls for service and hard-ship and trained manhood, and it gives in return a new consciousness of the worth of the Republic. If you would love at your best, do something for that which you love. Parents love their children most when they have done their best for them; children love their parents most when they become their support and solace. The fountain of love is opened to the infinite depths only by unselfish service. The flag of the nation presented this day to this church, by members in our communion, who fought in the war for the preservation of the Union, in sacred memory of the men of four regiments, represents a love made mighty, and lasting as life, by sacrificial service. Ask our youth to dream dreams of the country that is theirs, to train to defend it, in all times of need, as part of their obligation, and the Republic will open new fountains of loyalty and enthusiastic devotion in all hearts. Our ideal of education is of a nation universally trained for life and all its essential interests, and thus maintaining through all changes its democratic character, a nation owned, loved, served and defended by the sovereign people.

Can we doubt that such a nation will always command, in every day of crisis, the homage of its people? Can we doubt the loyalty to this beneficent Republic, if worse comes to worst, of any class of our citizens, English, Irish, Scottish, Scandinavian, French, Italian, German? My Pro-German Irish friend who sells newspapers at the Park Street entrance to the subway is

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typical. His confession is this: "I am with the Germans till they attack this country; then I am agin them forever." The words of the great recruiting song of the Scottish National Poet, when Napoleon was planning his invasion of Britain, fittingly express, I believe, the passion of our citizens, native and adopted, and adopted from all lands and races. Here is a single stanza of that song, with a few words changed to meet the present situation:

*"Does haughty [Teut.] invasion threat,
Then let the loons beware, Sir!
There's [iron] walls upon our seas
And volunteers on shore, Sir!
The Nith shall run to Corsincon,
And Criffel sink in Solway,
Ere we permit a foreign foe
On [this great land] to rally!"*

Another stanza of the same song, confessing our own troubles and at the same time fiercely prohibiting outside interference in the settlement of them, may not be out of place:

*"The kettle o' the Kirk and State,
Perhaps a clout may fail in't:
But deil a foreign tinkler loon
Shall ever ca' a nail in't.
Our fathers' blude the kettle bought,
And wha would dare to spoil it?
By Heavens! the sacrilegious dog
Shall fuel be to boil it!"*

For the only adequate philosophy of American loyalty we come now to my text. There are

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among human beings wise love and unwise. Wise love appears with worth in the object of it, and saving benefit in the subject of it. Unwise love is made evident by two things, the absence of worth in the object of it, the absence of saving benefit in the subject of it. Cordelia loves worth in her father, worth in her husband; her soul is saved by love. Romola, in George Eliot's great novel, loves Tito; hence her sorrow. Her greatest sorrow is that to save her soul she must cease to love the worthless object of it.

This is the truth that rises into clearness, like the world in the light of morning, in the great words of Jesus: "For where thy treasure is there will thy heart be also." Love and treasure go together always. Where the treasure is only a fancy, a dream; where it is not a reality love must eventually die. Where the treasure is unimaginably great, there love goes from strength to strength, till both the treasure and the love find themselves eternally one in the heavenly world.

Because the America that we behold and love has in it worth immeasurable, and because we who love America know the saving benefit that our love and our service bring, we are confident of our loyalty to our country in her day of crisis, our increasing attachment, our ever-deepening sense of gratitude, our devotion to the uttermost. We shall see to it that no weapon formed against her shall prosper; we pledge her our best endeavor and our highest prayer that in the immemorial mornings and evenings of coming time, she may appear an

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ever greater nation, fairer in the light of approaching and lovelier in the glow of receding day; and when at last we must bid her farewell, we shall leave her in the secret place of the Most High, and under the shadow of the Almighty.

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